



The Sultan's Legacy : How Young People in Yogyakarta Navigate Traditional Authority in an Era of Rational-Legal Authority

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Abstract

This study focuses on presenting how young people in Yogyakarta navigate traditional authority in their daily lives amid the dominance of rational legal authority. The research context was conducted in the context of understanding the phenomenon of a series of large-scale demonstrations in Indonesia from late August to early September 2025. This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data collection was conducted through direct interviews with five young people native to Yogyakarta who are pursuing higher education in Yogyakarta. The specific location that became the locus of this study was Yogyakarta for three main reasons. First, the unique socio-political conditions in Yogyakarta, which combine a democratic government system and a royal palace system. Second, the awareness of the youth of Yogyakarta as citizens of the province and citizens of the royal palace. Third, the actions of Sultan Hamengkubuwono X in controlling the masses when the demonstrations turned violent. The results of the study show that a leadership system based on traditional authority is not always negative. In fact, at certain moments, leadership based on traditional authority is more effective than leadership based on legal rational authority. This can be a further reflection on the model of modern community leadership, especially in Indonesia, regarding the appropriate leadership in overcoming social dynamics in community life.

Keywords : youth; demonstration; traditional authority; rational legal authority

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INTRODUCTION

The research in this article attempts to interrupt or at least provide a counter-narrative to the assumption that legal-rational authority, especially in a democratic system of government, is always more effective and rational than other systems of authority. Max Weber's conceptual framework of the three authorities that apply in society, namely traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational authority, forms the basis of the definitions in this study. Traditional authority refers to power and leadership based on traditional values passed down from generation to generation (Weber 2009) . An example of this is the royal system: power is traditionally and formally passed down to the crown prince. Meanwhile, charismatic authority refers to power and leadership based on the magical power of leaders who are considered to have special charisma, such as Kyai and other religious leaders (Márquez 2025). For Weber, legal rationality is the pinnacle of the most effective modern social authority because it is rational in nature. Rational legal authority here refers to power led by rational consciousness in the form of formal laws resulting from mutual agreement among the people (Ritzer and Goodman 2016; Weber 1978) . Examples include modern countries today, including Indonesia, which implement democracy regulated within a rational legal landscape(Kurniawan 2020).

Over time, the existence and truth of rational legality as an effective and appropriate authority in regulating modern society has become a seemingly irrefutable narrative. For example, in Ritzer's book(2019) , it is explained that Max Weber assumed that society would move towards modernization, which needed to be supported by a bureaucratic system based on rational legal authority. Furthermore, Weber also predicted that charismatic and traditional authorities would begin to be abandoned by society because they were increasingly ineffective and inefficient in regulating increasingly complex social conditions(Weber 2009, 2015) . For example, studies from Heydebrand(2003) and Kettler and Meja(1996) assume rational legal authority as the appropriate system for understanding the complexity of modern society as a given. This condition indicates the existence of rational legal dominance as a politics of hope in carrying out social life (Lacelle-webster 2024).

However, the large-scale demonstrations that occurred in Indonesia throughout August-September 2025 provide a different perspective. The burning of buildings and chaos in various regions, including Pati, Jakarta, Surabaya, and Makassar, indicate the failure of rational legal authority to control the situation. Rational legal authority and rational public awareness seemed paralyzed in the face of anger. The masses raged, demanding their rational legal leaders without

obedience or hesitation. Civil rebellion became a reality and terrorized the state with its rational legal authority.

Amidst the unstoppable riots, Yogyakarta presented a distinctive atmosphere. Yogyakarta became an exception amidst the riots that occurred due to the blunders made by officials. Starting from the policy blunder of increasing land and building tax (PBB) by 250% in Pati (Puspita 2025), the blunder of increasing officials' salaries amid poor employment opportunities (CNN 2025a; Ritonga 2025), to the blunder of speaking to the media in response to the people's complaints. For example, council member Sahroni actually called the public "stupid" in front of the media for criticizing the DPR, which should be disbanded (CNN 2025b; Faisol 2025). These various blunders resulted in chaos, but the chaos in Yogyakarta had a different feel to it. This phenomenon extends beyond merely signifying a disruption of demonstrative practices and an obstruction to the twenty-first-century revolutionary paradigm articulated by Moghadam (2019); it simultaneously foregrounds distinctive modalities of upheaval while embedding the events within highly particularized spatial and socio-political contexts.

In Makassar, the provincial DPRD building was completely burned down. In fact, the fire claimed lives. Data from detiksulsel (2025) shows that the death toll from the fire in Sulawesi has risen to four: three victims were burned when the DPRD building was set on fire, while one person died after being beaten by the crowd (Ayu 2025).

Equally terrifying, in Surabaya, the Grahadi building, a cultural heritage site and source of pride for the people of East Java, was also set on fire (Amaluddin 2025). Khofifah's presence on the morning of August 30 failed to calm the crowd and prevent them from destroying Surabaya. That same evening, Surabaya remained ablaze with anger, which also consumed Grahadi (Septiana 2025).

Meanwhile, a special case occurred in Yogyakarta. The people of Yogyakarta also grew angry and took several actions. The first action took place on the evening of August 29 in response to the death of Affan Kurniawan. On Friday night, the crowd went to the Yogyakarta Regional Police Headquarters (Polda DIY) and staged a demonstration that tended to be destructive. As the night went on, more and more fires broke out. One of the buildings next to the police headquarters was set on fire (Mustaqim 2025).

However, towards midnight, the governor and Sultan of the Yogyakarta Palace came to meet the demonstrators. Hamengkubuwono X arrived without military escort. His presence was welcomed by the demonstrators. The Sultan of Yogyakarta appreciated, affirmed, and supported the demonstrators in voicing their opinions. However, he advised them to maintain a conducive atmosphere in Yogyakarta (Asih 2025). Sultan Hamengkubuwono X spoke in a tone that sought to calm the crowd. There were no bottles thrown or insults hurled throughout his speech. At the end, Sultan Hamengkubuwono X, who is also the governor of DIY, asked all the demonstrators to go home because it was already nighttime (Wawan 2025). After that, all the demonstrators went home in an orderly manner and there was no significant damage to Yogyakarta compared to other big cities.

This particular case indicates that there is something that rational legal authorities lack in effectively controlling crowds. In the case of Yogyakarta, rational legal authority, when combined with traditional authority (the sultanate), possesses a magical power that can influence young people's consciousness toward compliance. Therefore, this study will further analyze the August-September 2025 demonstrations in Yogyakarta through the lens of young people's consciousness regarding the reality of the authority in their place of residence.

RESEARCH METHODS

This This research is qualitative in nature. Salim (2006) illustrates qualitative research as an effort to explore individual views through a direct approach to informants. Thus, it can minimize the shallowness of data. In an effort to understand the awareness of Yogyakarta youth regarding regional leadership that combines traditional (sultanate) and legal-rational systems, the researcher conducted *in-depth interviews* with informants. Therefore, qualitative research is considered relevant in examining this phenomenon.

Furthermore, this study uses a case study approach. Yin (1981) explains case studies as an approach that serves to explore, investigate, and identify a social phenomenon in a real and empirical context. Salim (2006) emphasizes that case studies are specific, particular, and local in scale. This is relevant to the research in this article, which seeks to understand the awareness of Yogyakarta youth regarding the dual authority of Hamengkubuwono X, particularly in the demonstrations in Yogyakarta on August 31, 2025. In addition, to sharpen the data, this study also adopts discourse analysis on the Instagram account @jogja.

The selection of subjects in this study was purposive. The application of purposive sampling was based on the need for informants who met the criteria of the research objectives (Usman and Akbar 2017). Therefore, to determine the awareness of Yogyakarta youth regarding leadership, the researcher set the following criteria for informants. First, they must be young people born in Yogyakarta. Second, they must be pursuing higher education. Third, currently residing and settled in Yogyakarta. The following is the mapping of the research subjects.

No	Name (Initials)	Age	Gender	Region of Origin
1	HQ	25	L	Sleman
2	HN	22	P	Sleman
3	AY	24	P	Kulon Progo
4	PAY	24	L	Sleman
5	HZ	25	L	Sleman

These three characteristics are based on the assumption that youth are defined as human entities undergoing a transition from the world of education to the world of work (Strinati 2020). Furthermore, the selection of subjects who are pursuing higher education (university students) is based on the assumption that they possess the awareness to read phenomena more critically. This is because the research in this article focuses on demonstrations that tend to involve university students as their mass base. Third, young people who have lived and settled in Yogyakarta for a long time are assumed to have internalized the sultanate culture.

This research was conducted in September. The location of the research was in Yogyakarta for several reasons. First, Yogyakarta has a special socio-political condition, with privileges in governing the region. Second, there is an awareness among the people of Yogyakarta that they are citizens of the province and citizens of the palace. Third, the sultan's actions when he came down to the demonstration on August 29, 2025, were at least successful in controlling the crowd.

Data collection was carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. Interviews were conducted in an unstructured manner to elicit more in-depth information from informants. Data analysis was carried out through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. For additional data, this study also used video data from the @Jogja account, which was then analyzed as a contextualization of the demonstration. The results of the analysis were then merged into a coherent whole in the discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dual Authority and Youth Awareness in Yogyakarta

The entity of Yogyakarta as a special region is a consequence of Law Number 3 of 1950 and Law Number 13 of 2012, which stipulate that Yogyakarta has two authorities, namely traditional authority and rational legal authority. Traditional authority is enshrined in Law No. 3 of 1950, which states that Sultan Hamengkubuwono and Adipati Paku Alam are recognized as hereditary leaders of the region in the form of a sultanate. Meanwhile, rational legal authority is stipulated in the same law in the statement that Yogyakarta is a province led by the sultan as governor and the duke as deputy governor (Republik Indonesia 1950).

The reality of Yogyakarta as a special city with this duality of power, traditional and rational legal, also gives dual authority to its leader. The Governor of Yogyakarta and the Sultan of Yogyakarta are the same person. This means that one person holds two authorities simultaneously. In the case of the 2025 Yogyakarta demonstrations, Hamengkubuwono X was both governor and Sultan. He was the rational legal leader of the Yogyakarta community in a democratic system of government in relation to the national government. However, Hamengkubuwono X was also a Sultan or king for the people of Yogyakarta, who were the highest leaders. This is the reality of the dual authority of the leaders of Yogyakarta.

Nevertheless, the dual authority of the Yogyakarta leader does not exist separately in the daily consciousness of its youth. Based on interviews with Yogyakarta youth who are also actively observing the sultan's governance, H stated:

Is it possible that DIY has two authorities, the governor and the king, in the eyes of the Indonesian people? I don't think so, because the two authorities are merged, as if they are one. So we never separate them; basically, we never see them as something different.

(Interview on 9/19/2025)

This is also reinforced by A's statement, which expresses a similar idea in a different tone:

It's the same dual consciousness as H's, I agree, I never separate the two, especially things like, what is it, the interests of the Sultan, the interests of the Sultan, as king, or as governor, I don't say things like that. (Interview 19/9/2025)

However, on the other hand, the merging of the two authorities of the sultan and the governor in the consciousness of young people can also be seen, albeit vaguely and not explicitly.

... but perhaps there are people who view the Sultan in two ways, especially if they are from other communities. When they feel threatened, they may view the Sultan as their protector, as their king. So when they feel threatened, they believe that "we have a sultan" who will protect his people. By giving them land and land guarantees, this is also proof of the sultan's support. But when there are other complaints related to their livelihoods, such as policies and so on, perhaps this will be criticized as the governor's fault. (Interview with A, 9/19/2025)

That's how it is, because the dual consciousness I mentioned also arises. For example, when we see problems in Yogyakarta, such as trash, parking lot issues, or the sultan's absence, we will view him as a governor. We will criticize him. (Interview with H, 19/9/2025)

At a certain point, the youth of Yogyakarta understand that the sultan's authority is not as great as that of a governor, who has practical authority on a national scale. For example, on technical issues such as the garbage problem in Yogyakarta, for them as educated youth, it is not the sultan's business, but the governor's as the legal and rational technical leader.

However, the status of the sultan is understood by young people and the community as a protector when they are threatened. The narrative "We Have a Sultan" is effectively understood as a way for young people to understand the leader who is expected to side with his people, namely them and the entire community of Yogyakarta.

On the other hand, there is an awareness among young people that technical issues would be easier to resolve if carried out with the traditional authority of the sultanate:

Actually, if the Sultan wanted to solve the garbage problem using a decree, he could do it. The community would obey and the garbage problem would be solved. But so far, to my knowledge and experience, this has never been done. (Interview with A, 9/19/2025)

Here, it can be seen that the sultan, as a traditional authority, has absolute authority in the form of decrees. The sultan's decrees are absolute and must be obeyed. Based on research

from Pawana(2020) , there are two types of sultan decrees, namely sabdatama and sabdaraja. Meanwhile, research from Rizani (2016) reviews the legal aspects of sabdatama, sabdaraja, and duwaraja decrees from a constitutional law perspective. However, in the research in this article, decrees refer to the sultan's verbal statements that tend to be informal appeals, such as when urging the community to evacuate from Mount Merapi, urging the community to stay at home during Covid, and urging the community to protect Yogyakarta from destructive acts.

However, throughout the history of Yogyakarta youth knowledge, the sultan's decree has only been used for matters of certainty. It is rarely used for technical matters concerning Yogyakarta youth affairs.

Because I've never really experienced it, at least in my era, I've never really felt the presence of a royal decree. A royal decree is really a government regulation. The case yesterday was not... But here are some examples of Tita's decrees, such as the evacuation of Merapi.
(Interview with Mas H, September 19, 2025)

Based on the young people's knowledge, the Sultan's decrees have never touched on aspects that have the potential for controversy. The Sultan tends to issue decrees on matters that are certain to be followed, such as the evacuation of Merapi, staying at home during Covid, and instructions not to damage Yogyakarta during the August 2025 demonstrations. However, according to the youth of Yogyakarta, the Sultan's decrees have the potential to be effective if applied to technical matters related to waste management and other issues in Yogyakarta.

At this point, the awareness of educated young people in Yogyakarta becomes interesting when they acknowledge the effectiveness of traditional feudal leadership. In fact, in the academic world, feudalism is considered an outdated authority that is beginning to be abandoned. However, in Yogyakarta, it exists and is recognized, adored, and even boasted about by its young people.

I am proud, I guess. In Yogyakarta, there is a palace, and if you have ever been inside it, it is really beautiful. I think it is something to be really proud of as a resident of Yogyakarta.
(Interview with H, September 20, 2025)

Rather than seeing it as something negative, such as the spirit of enlightenment(Hardiman 2019; Horkheimer and Adorno 2014; Ritzer and Stepnisky 2019) , the youth of Yogyakarta proudly acknowledge the uniqueness of Yogyakarta precisely because of its traditional authority. In other words, the youth of Yogyakarta recognize that there is

something good about traditional authority in Yogyakarta. In fact, it is this authority that makes Yogyakarta feel special compared to other regions where traditional authority is only interpreted culturally, not structurally, which is politically legitimate under the auspices of rational legal democracy. We have a sultan is an expression of serious pride in the consciousness of the youth of Yogyakarta. Furthermore, the expression "we have a sultan" indicates two things, namely pride in the traditional authority that embodies and trust in the authority that sides with its people. At a certain point, the youth of Yogyakarta see traditional authorities such as the sultan as being closer to the people than legal rational authorities such as the governor. A said:

From childhood, our parents taught us that we have a sultan. They (our parents) preferred to introduce the sultan as the sultan, because he felt closer to the people than the governor.
(Interview with A, 19/9/2025)

Weber(2009) , explicitly explains that traditional authority does indeed maintain its value through the socialization of the dynasty from generation to generation. Dynasty in this sense is not only the royal family of the ruling family, but also spreads to the families of the people. The socialization of the values of the sultanate from the family to young people resulted in an ingrained awareness of pride in the sultan, giving rise to the expression "we have a sultan".

Moreover, the pride of the youth of Yogyakarta regarding the existence of this traditional authority is loyal in nature. In other words, the youth do not want the special status of this traditional authority to be removed from Yogyakarta. This is because if the status of this traditional legal authority is lost, Yogyakarta will no longer be special.

However, amid the clamor of pride as subjects of the sultanate, educated young people in Yogyakarta also found flaws. They considered the Sultan as a traditional authority to be *untouchable*, immune to criticism and input. In fact, the essence of youth is intellectual politics. Young people who are also students always have a passion for criticism as intellectuals. As Gramsci states in Gramsci(2019) , an intellectual must be organic. An organic intellectual is deeply involved in criticism that sides with their oppressed social class. Therefore, an intellectual who is unable to construct criticism is no different from a silent genius. In line with this, Ranciere, as cited in Haryatmoko(2016) , points out that intellectual backwardness occurs

when the intelligence of the youth is subjugated to other forms of intelligence (traditional authorities that are anti-criticism).

Therefore, the youth of Yogyakarta have devised a strategy to maintain their space for criticizing the leaders of Yogyakarta, who hold two authorities. As subjects of the sultan, they are obedient and submissive. However, as citizens under the rational legal leadership of the governor, they demand welfare in the form of criticism. In other words, young people remain critical under two regimes of authority, traditional and rational legal. However, criticism is only directed at leaders in their capacity as rational legal authorities.

Ultimately, several factors can be identified that shape the awareness of Yogyakarta's youth regarding the authority of their leaders. First, families shape the awareness of Yogyakarta's youth to navigate positively and proudly as subjects of the palace. Second, the Yogyakarta community shares the same awareness of the palace's special position as the supreme leader. Third, the media plays a role in branding Yogyakarta as a special region with dual authority status. Fourth, higher education instills awareness in young people to remain critical with strategic tactics.

Demonstrations: The Role of Traditional Authority and Youth Awareness

The dual authority of Yogyakarta's leaders has a unique significance in understanding demonstrations. The process of forming awareness from generation to generation through family, community, and media has led young people, including students, to navigate Yogyakarta with two distinctive expressions: Yogyakarta belongs to us, we belong to the sultan. This expression shapes young people's awareness to care about the security of Yogyakarta. Historically, the sultan, as a traditional authority, has consistently sided with the people and helped protect Yogyakarta from destructive conditions. For example, historical research from Fitrianti & Bahroni (2024) on the social movement in Yogyakarta in 1998 led to the holding of a *grand pisowanan*, a meeting between the king and his people, with the agenda of reading the sultan's proclamation supporting the 1998 reform movement. The sultan's response at that time was aimed at nothing less than restoring order and mutual respect in Yogyakarta.

In August 2025, history almost repeated itself. A series of demonstrations that led to riots in various regions of Indonesia, such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Makassar, also spread to

Yogyakarta (). In Yogyakarta, demonstrations began on August 29 in the afternoon and continued until midnight. As the night progressed, the situation became increasingly tense. Amidst the increasingly chaotic demonstrations, at around 10:30 p.m. Western Indonesian Time, the car of Sultan Hamengkubuwono X passed from Gejayan Street to the Yogyakarta Regional Police Headquarters without an escort (Daeng, 2025). The Sultan's presence was warmly welcomed by the demonstrators, and his arrival was accompanied by the demonstrators singing the song Indonesia Pusaka (Asih, 2025). Before meeting with the crowd, the Sultan held a meeting with representatives of the demonstrators in one of the rooms at the Yogyakarta Regional Police Headquarters. The demonstrators conveyed their demands directly to the Sultan. On that occasion, the Sultan promised to convey these aspirations to the central government (Firdaus, et al., 2025).

Although the destructive actions did not completely end, the Sultan's presence at least succeeded in calming the riots. The demonstrators began to calm down when the Sultan walked towards the Yogyakarta Regional Police Headquarters courtyard accompanied by the Raja Manggala gendhing (Sunartono, 2025). This gendhing is usually played when the Sultan meets official guests of the palace. According to the website kabarjawa.com, "Raja Manggala means leader or main king. This gendhing is played when Sri Sultan miyos receives royal guests. Its presentation is similar to Gendhing Prabu Mataram." This gendhing became a magical force that calmed the demonstrators.

The playing of the Raja Manggala gendhing indicates a traditional act (Damsar, 2017). This is because gendhing is part of the palace culture that represents the historical values of Javanese culture (gendhing quote). Furthermore, the tradition of playing this gendhing is carried out when there are special guests at the palace. This means that the Sultan treated the demonstrators as special guests in conveying their aspirations. Thus, respect and obedience became moral social actions for the demonstrators (Ritzer, 2014). This condition shows that criticism of the state was successfully softened through the traditional values conveyed by the Sultan. Weber (Weber, 1947) refers to this control as traditional authority. This is reinforced by HA's statement:

When the king went out to meet his people, he also used songs like that. Isn't it true that the songs when the Sultan spoke were songs that characterized that the Sultan was teaching his son, Tita, that these words must be followed? Actually, friends, there is nothing specific about this song for him to give sabdo mandi toratu. But it is a symbol. A symbol of him as a king. The

king of Mataram. On the land of Mataram. This song is like that. This is the song when he meets his people. (Interview with HA 9/19/2025)

In addition to traditional authority, which temporarily succeeded in calming the demonstrators, there was also the role of charismatic authority. Charismatic authority came from the actions of the group in defining the Sultan (Damsar, 2017). This definition comes from the accumulation of Hamengkubuwono's habitus during his time as leader. When viewed based on the video from the @jogja account, the Sultan delivered his decree calmly without being overly enthusiastic. This is certainly different from the arrogant response displayed by some members of the police and the House of Representatives. The Sultan also repeatedly showed that he agreed with the people. Emotionally, this has the potential to foster trust in the Sultan as a figure who protects the people. Thus, charisma can be an antidote to conflict. This is because charisma can bring about a subjective reorientation of actors (Ritzer, 2014).

The Sultan conveyed his decree to the demonstrators, starting with expressions of condolences, support for the aspirations of the people, to appeals not to take actions that would cause riots. The following is the decree in the form of an appeal delivered by the Sultan:

"I am deeply concerned and saddened by the death of Affan Kurniawan. Why are there always victims in the effort to build democracy? In Yogyakarta, we should be able to engage in dialogue because we are a city of education. With mutual agreement, we can respect each other's rights,"

"I appreciate what you all are doing, because it is part of the growth of democracy in this republic. I agree with that, but I hope that the democratic process is carried out properly and educates us all, because in Yogyakarta there is no tradition of violence in building democracy,"

“We facilitate dialogue with the central government, either through me personally or through letters, in which my friends submit their aspirations. If my energy and thoughts are needed, please let me know. But I must receive the letter as a basis for discussion with the central government,”

“Let us build a sustainable dialogue. Since it is already 1:00 a.m., let us all go home and rest. We are all tired,”

Although the sultan's presence in creating a conducive atmosphere for the demonstration was predominantly supported by traditional charismatic authority, for the youth of Yogyakarta, this was not merely a political event. However, there was a symbolic element. This symbolic element was evident in the sultan's authority in controlling the demonstrators. This cannot be separated from the social construct that frames the image of the sultan.

Additionally, tradition and culture also legitimize the Sultan's authority, enabling him to enforce compliance during the demonstration.

As for why it was so conducive, I'm not sure if the people who demonstrated yesterday were all foreigners or not. But perhaps it was also due to the construction of the Sultan's image in the media. He must be respected as a king, the governor's justice as a king. The Sultan's image is that he is a protective king, and earlier, the Sultan's parents gave their wealth to be used for the students. That's how his image is formed. Perhaps not all of the demonstrators were from Yogyakarta, but perhaps those from outside Yogyakarta were exposed to favorable media coverage of the Sultan. So they ended up joining in. The Sultan must be portrayed favorably. (Interview with A, 9/19/2025)

Ultimately, for the youth of Yogyakarta, the Sultan's presence in the demonstrations tends to be interpreted through the framework of traditional and charismatic authority. The figure of the Sultan is not only present as a political leader but also as a cultural symbol that links historical values with contemporary reality. In Weber's framework, this shows how "charismatic authority arises from belief in the extraordinary qualities of an individual" (Weber, 1947), which in the context of Yogyakarta is combined with traditional legitimacy rooted in the Palace. Thus, it is reasonable why the youth of Yogyakarta are loyal with the expression "we have a sultan".

Thus, the Sultan's presence in the midst of the action not only ignited enthusiasm but also provided symbolic meaning that emphasized the closeness between the people and their leader. The conclusion of the event also showed the distinctive face of Yogyakarta. On September 1, 2025, the demonstration at the UGM (Gadjah Mada University) roundabout took place peacefully, proving that protest spaces and city tranquility can coexist.

The Sultanate as a Counter-Hegemony to Rational Legal Authority

In contemporary democratic systems, rational legal authority is considered the most ideal concept of governance. This concept of authority is seen as capable of producing rational governance based on mutually agreed rules and equal access to bureaucracy (Kronman 1983). These fundamental principles make it the hegemonic narrative in modern state leadership, including in Indonesia.

However, no narrative is able to present itself in its entirety. Every narrative always faces dislocations that make it questionable, contested, and filled with new meanings (Laclau

and Mouffe 2001) . The demonstrations that took place in August 2025 revealed various issues of dislocation. On a national scale, this could signal an internal crisis within the rational legal authority itself. The assumption that society within a rational legal authority is always based on law(Kronman 1983) is, at a certain point, questioned in terms of its relevance. For example, when faced with demonstrations and a crisis of confidence in authority.

Demonstrations, although guaranteed by law, often involve actions that violate the law(J 2012) . In the context of the August 2025 demonstrations, the destruction of public facilities and the burning of government buildings are examples of how demonstrations often cause harm. In addition, the state's efforts to quell the demonstrations often took the form of repressive measures, such as kidnapping and violence against demonstrators. It is at this point that the crisis of legal-rational authority occurs, when the law and bureaucracy as its foundation are no longer relevant in certain contexts of state life. Thus, legal-rational authority is not a perfect authority without flaws, but rather a narrative that can also be challenged and questioned.

The demonstrations in Yogyakarta are an interesting case in the context of the crisis of confidence in authority. Unlike what happened on a national scale, where many regional heads were unable to stem the tide of mass unrest, the direct presence of Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X succeeded in calming the situation. The demonstrators then voluntarily dispersed after a brief dialogue with the Sultan. Explicitly, this event illustrates the Sultan's special position in Yogyakarta society, where respect and obedience remain intact even in the midst of a national crisis. In line with this, HF stated:

"... the Sultan's status in daily practice *has* a huge *impact*." (HF interview on September 22, 2025)

This phenomenon confirms that Hamengkubuwono X's position as Sultan is more effective in influencing people's behavior. This is in line with HF's statement that the Sultan, as the holder of traditional authority, is very dominant in the life of the people of Yogyakarta. In fact, Yogyakarta's status as a tourist center means that it is not immune to modernization. A modern regime that always demands rationality should render traditional authorities such as the sultanate irrelevant. However, the case of Yogyakarta shows the opposite, where traditional authority persists.

If law and bureaucracy are the foundations of rational legal authority, then kinship-based relationships are the basis for traditional authority(Kronman 1983) . The family is a

social institution where values of obedience to traditional leadership are socialized. This is in line with the opinion of HA, a young man from Yogyakarta, who stated that values of obedience to the Sultan are reproduced through everyday social practices.

"Not from school. I learned it from my family. My family and the surrounding environment informally taught me what is and is not allowed in the palace." (Interview with HA, September 19, 2025)

Similarly, HF also expressed a similar view on the role of the family in transmitting these values:

"... even though I am a homebody, the influence of the palace still reaches me indirectly through daily habits." (Interview with HF on 9/22/2025)

The statements by HA and HF affirm that in the lives of young people in Yogyakarta, the family is both the agent and the space where the noble values of the sultanate are reproduced. Discourse regarding behavior, language, and dress codes socialized within the family serves as a marker for youth to navigate their relationship with the Sultan. In this context, the relationship between the family system and traditional authority is indeed very close. Kronman(1983) states that the family is the foundation of the moral economy of traditional authority. Meanwhile, Rust(2018) uses the communality within the family as an illustration of how this authority works.

In addition to socialization within the family sphere, the hegemony of traditional authority is also reinforced by the cultural identity symbols displayed by the Sultan in public spaces. Laclau and Mouffe(2001) refer to this as *a chain of equivalence*, a condition in which the various particular identities of Yogyakarta residents are calibrated through cultural symbols. The use of cultural symbols like this, to a certain extent, is able to bind the Sultan and the community into a single discourse and shared cultural network.

"... even though I've never met him directly, this might be what makes me feel like I have a connection with the Sultan—the similarity" (Interview with H on 9/22/2025).

This hegemonic situation can also be seen as a way for the youth of Yogyakarta to interpret their citizenship through *traditional actions*. This type of action positions leaders as role models who are consistent with their culture and traditions(Rust 2018) . This is what—so far—has not been formed by rational legal authority. Mechanistic bureaucracy and law do not

provide space for cultural and emotional relationships to develop. Thus, such conditions imply the instability of the hegemony of rational legal legitimacy.

However, even though traditional authority has proven to be effective in Yogyakarta society, the practices of how this authority is articulated are not as rigid as classical feudalism. Weber himself emphasized that traditional authority works under a feudal regime full of social stereotypes, where "the ruled" only have the choice to obey "the rulers"(Kronman 1983) . Slightly shifting from this accusation, the Sultanate of Yogyakarta appears to be more adaptive to the demands of a dynamic era, where the strict rules of the sultanate began to be limited in several aspects of society, such as education, economy, and politics. The youth's obedience to the Sultan's hegemony was not entirely present. There is *an empty signifier* that young people try to negotiate in order to redefine their identity as citizens of Yogyakarta.

"... if he suddenly becomes reckless like the Regent of Pati, then I would have no reason to respect him anymore. For me, one of the reasons I still feel submissive to the Sultan is because I still respect him. From how he has ingrained the culture of Yogyakarta. At least from what is seen in public" (Interview with HF on 9/22/2025)

Thus, the traditional authority of the Yogyakarta Sultanate cannot be viewed as a rigid and static structure, but one that continues to move and negotiate with the changes in life. Through the open-ended markers that young people can fill in— —the Sultan’s hegemony remains relevant but not absolute. Thus, the cultural narrative “We have a Sultan” does not arise from blind obedience but from a cultural discourse that is continually navigated in the lives of Yogyakarta’s youth.

CONCLUSION

The August 2025 demonstrations in Yogyakarta show that no ideal system is absolutely valid. Every system, especially regarding authority, is always bound by the sociocultural context that surrounds its society. In this context, rational legal authority, which has been considered the most ideal, lost its hegemony amid a national crisis. On the contrary, traditional authority, such as the Sultanate of Yogyakarta, succeeded in calming the masses through dialogue. This phenomenon not only shows the Sultan's magical power and charisma, but also embodies the hegemony of traditional authority in the life of the people of Yogyakarta. This means that the obedience of the masses at the 2025 demonstration is only one symptom of a broader social structure.

The narrative "We have a Sultan" is a reflection of this social structure. Through socialization within the family, conditioning in the social environment, and the articulation of cultural symbols, this narrative has become the cultural identity of the youth of Yogyakarta. However, even though traditional authority stems from a feudal system that tends to be closed, the Sultanate of Yogyakarta seems to be an exception. The Sultan's authority is not legitimized by blind obedience, but rather by a process of negotiation and cultural articulation that is constantly evolving. Therefore, the Sultan's success in quelling the demonstrations is not merely a matter of charisma, but a reflection of an open hegemony that is responsive to the changing times. This also makes the Sultanate an interesting topic for further study in the discourse on contemporary authority.

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